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Peking Says Soviet Threat Has Eased

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PEKING, Oct. 4 — The Peking leadership no longer believes that China is in imminent danger of attack by the Soviet Union and has written off the chances of negotiating a peaceful settlement with Taiwan so long as Chiang Kai-shek and his son, Chiang Ching-kuo, remain in control on the island.

These and other insights into the changing perspectives of Chinese foreign policy emerged during a series of background discussions over the past ten days between high-ranking officials of the Peking government and members of a visiting group of Canadian journalists.

The officials, who insisted that their remarks be unattributed, said that current Chinese policy proceeded from the belief that the Soviet Union regarded the United States as its main enemy and, in any event, would not attack China until it had secured its rear by establishing domination over Europe and the Middle East.

On Taiwan, the officials said that China continued to favor a peaceful settlement but regarded this as impossible under the Chiangs. It was not an urgent matter and could be solved by the next generation if not by this, the officials said, but a military solution could not be ruled out if a peaceful one was not forthcoming.

Observers believe the latest remarks may be an attempt to step up pressure on the island government now that the diplomatic battle has essentially been won.

The remarks on Taiwan and on Sino-Soviet relations are a significant departure from the perspectives set forth in public statements over recent years. Similar observations have been made in recent weeks to visiting dignitaries, but it is the first time that they have been made for wide dissemination.

Until now, Peking's public position has been that China faces the danger of sudden attack by the Soviet Union and must take all necessary precautions against it. The warnings have come from China's top leadership, including Communist Party Chairman Mao Tse-tung and Premier Chou En-lai and have been an insistent theme ever since the border clashes that erupted in the spring and summer of 1969.

The officials said that there was no progress whatsoever in talks with the Soviets on border demarcation which began in the Chinese capital in October 1969.

In the discussions this week, the officials said that the danger of a Soviet attack could not be discounted entirely because the Soviet Union was an imperialist power and it was the nature of imperialism to make war. Furthermore, they said there was a tense situation on the frontier that had not yielded to five years of negotiations and this required a high level of military preparedness.

One official, who is close to the latest thinking on the problem said: "At the moment we do not think there is a possibility of the Soviet Union launching an immediate war against us. We hold that the strategic emphasis of the Soviet Union at the moment is in Europe... and that they will not dare to launch a war against China until they have the control of Europe and the Middle East."

He added: "The border situation is not being eased, so the possibility of small scale conflicts along the border can take place at almost any time. However, large-scale war is hardly possible at the moment."

The official acknowledged that Soviet frontier forces continue to conduct exercises "with the spearhead pointed against us" and this raised the possibility of "small scale clashes at any

time." But he insisted that the troop buildup posed a bigger threat to the United States and Japan than to China.

"We say that the million troops along the border are mainly directed against the U.S. and Japan and not so much against China," he said. "Of course, if they want to launch an attack against China, a million troops is not enough."

Asked to clarify the reference to the United States and Japan, the official answered obliquely by citing reports of recent Soviet naval activity near the Pacific island of Midway and around the Hawaiian Islands. These were units of the Soviet forces in the Far East, "and it is clear that their activity is not directed against China."

It was clear from this and other signs, the official said, that the Soviet Union regarded the United States as its main enemy.

This exposed the sham of detente, to which both Moscow and Washington paid lip service, "while in fact what they are thinking about is how to weaken the other so as to drown it" and proceed unchallenged in what he termed their bullying and manipulation of smaller countries.

In his remarks about the Soviet Union, the official referred more than once to Moscow's attempts at "subversion" within China, a theme that has received more emphasis since two alleged spying incidents earlier this year, the first when five Soviet embassy personnel were expelled after allegedly being caught with a Soviet-trained Chinese spy and the second when a Soviet military helicopter was captured in the western province of Sinkiang.

The Soviets repeatedly have demanded the release of the crew but in the discussions with the Canadians the Chinese hinted strongly that the crew members are being prepared for trial.

Said one official: "There is nothing more to say on this incident at the moment. But the helicopter in question came over to China to undertake espionage, so we shall deal with it according to law." He admitted "that it is possible" that the crew will be sentenced.

In earlier statements on the matter, Moscow warned Peking of unspecified consequences if the crew was not returned. But officials in Peking downplayed the importance of the issue, described it as "a minor incident" and comparing it to the more important questions that are outstanding, such as the demarcation of an agreed frontier.